We claim:

1. An indicator for detecting wear to at least one selected part in a semiconductor manufacturing environment, the indicator comprising:

a selected material having a selected thickness;

wherein said indicator degrades upon exposure to the semiconductor manufacturing environment at a fixed rate relative to the wear of the selected part; and,

wherein the indicator displays a visual indication of wear of the select part, said visual indication being discernible by an automated detection device.

2. The indicator of claim 1 wherein said selected material is the same material as the selected part.

3. The indicator of claim 1 wherein said visual indication comprises a distortion in the shape of said indicator.

4. The indicator of claim 1 wherein said indicator is affixed in close proximity to the selected part on a work stage of the semiconductor manufacturing process.

5. The indicator of claim 1, wherein said selected material is selected form a group of materials that have known, fixed wear characteristics relative to the note of wear exhibited by the material composing the selected part.

6. A method for detecting wear to at least one selected part in a semiconductor manufacturing environment, the method comprising:

providing an apparatus for processing a product comprising the at least one selected part;

providing a wear indicator comprising a selected material having a selected thickness;

exposing said wear indicator to the semiconductor manufacturing environment which degrades said wear indicator at a fixed rate relative to the wear of the selected part of said apparatus; and,

calculating the amount of wear to the selected part of said apparatus by examining said wear indicator with an automated detection device.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said selected material is the same material as said selected part.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein said visual indication comprises a distortion in the shape of said indicator.

9. The method of claim 6 wherein said indicator is affixed in close proximity to the selected part on a work stage of the semiconductor manufacturing process.

10. The method of claim 6 wherein said selected material is selected from a group of materials that have known, fixed wear characteristics relative to the rate of wear exhibited by the material composing the selected part.

11. An indicator for detecting wear to at least one selected part in a non-selective material removal system, the indicator comprising:

a selected material having selected thickness;

wherein said indicator degrades upon exposure to the non-selective material removal system at a fixed rate relative to the wear of the selected part; and

wherein the indicator displays a visual indication of wear to the selected part, said visual indication being discernible by an automated detection device.

12. The indicator of claim 11 wherein said selected material is the same material as the selected part.

13. The indicator of claim 11 wherein said visual indication comprises a distortion in the shape of said indicator.

14. The indicator of claim 11 wherein said indicator is affixed in close proximity to the selected part on a work stage of the semiconductor manufacturing process.

15. The indicator of claim 11 wherein said selected material is selected from a group of material that have known, fixed wear characteristics relative to the rate of wear exhibited by the material composing the selected part.

16. A method for detecting wear to at least one selected part in a non-selective material removal system, the method comprising:

providing an apparatus for processing a product comprising the at least one selected part;

providing a wear indicator, comprising a selected material having a selected thickness;

exposing said wear indicator to a non-selective material removal environment which erodes said wear indicator at a fixed rate relative to the wear of the selected parts of said apparatus;

calculating the amount of wear to the selected part of said apparatus by examining said wear indicator with an automated detection device.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein said selected material is the same material as the selected part.

18. The method of claim 16 wherein said visual indication comprises a distortion in the shape of said indicator.

19. The method of claim 16 wherein said indicator is affixed in close proximity to the selected part on a work stage of the semiconductor manufacturing process.

20. The method of claim 16 wherein said selected material is selected from a group of materials that have known, fixed wear characteristics relative to the rate of wear exhibited by the material composing the selected part.